



Seattle Human Rights Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Human Rights Commission Calls on City to Urge Water Quality Standards Protective of Health and Human Rights; Announces a Seattle Public Hearing on the Proposed Standards

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SEATTLE—Today the Seattle Human Rights Commission sent letters to the Mayor and City Council, urging them adopt a position on Washington State’s proposed revised Water Quality Standards (WQS) supportive of health and human rights. The Commission stated in their letter that “Our City residents and our economy are strongly rooted in fish. City residents should be able to eat fish caught in Washington waters without fearing that they have exposed themselves to harmful levels of toxics or placed themselves at undue risk of cancer.” Accordingly, the Commission asked the City to support the proposed resetting of the State’s fish consumption rate to an amount that will allow Washingtonians to healthfully eat one fish meal a day (175 g/day). Existing standards only protect Washington fish consumers in safely eating one fish meal a month (6.5 g/day). The Commission also urged the City to oppose the State’s proposed tenfold increase to Washingtonians’ cancer risk level. The fish consumption rate and the cancer risk level feed into a formula that the State uses to set limits on the amounts of toxic pollutants that can be released into the State’s waterways. In the course of a week, over a thousand Washingtonians—many Seattleites—have signed onto comments via change.org that urge the State to take this more health and human rights-based approach to revising our Water Quality Standards.

The Commission also announced that they will hold a public hearing on the proposed new Water Quality Standards at City Hall (Bertha Knight Landes Room) on Tuesday, March 17 at 6 p.m. This is in response to the State Department of Ecology (DOE) not scheduling a public hearing north of Olympia. The Commission noted that as almost a third of State residents live in King County, this hearing will afford those residents an opportunity to be heard. DOE, the Mayor, and City Council have been invited to attend.

As set forth in the Commission’s letter, the specific internationally-recognized human rights at stake are the right to health, the right to subsistence, and the right to conditions that enable health. The Commission additionally noted that Native American, Asian, and Pacific Islander residents make up 15 percent of City residents and are at disproportionate risk of adverse effects with respect to the change in cancer risk level because they consume fish at even higher rates than the new proposed fish consumption rate. A low fish consumption rate or a high cancer risk level could leave those individuals without even minimal health and human rights protections. The Commission stated that “This raises a serious health equity issue.”###